What's My Carbon Footprint

A carbon footprint can be defined as the total amount of greenhouse gases produced to directly and indirectly support human activities, usually expressed in equivalent tons of carbon dioxide (CO2).

In other words: When you drive a car, the engine burns fuel which creates a certain amount of CO2, depending on its fuel consumption and the driving distance. (CO2 is the chemical symbol for carbon dioxide). When you heat your house with oil, gas or coal, then you also generate CO2. Even if you heat your house with electricity, the generation of the electrical power may also have emitted a certain amount of CO2. When you buy food and goods, the production of the food and goods also emitted some quantities of CO2.

**Your carbon footprint is the sum of all emissions of CO2 (carbon dioxide), which were induced by your activities in a given time frame.** Usually a carbon footprint is calculated for the time period of a year.

Inevitably, in going about our daily lives — commuting, sheltering our families, eating — each of us contributes to the greenhouse gas emissions that are causing climate change. Yet, there are many things each of us, as individuals, can do to reduce our carbon emissions. The choices we make in our homes, our travel, the food we eat, and what we buy and throw away all influence our carbon footprint and can help ensure a stable climate for future generations.

Directions:

* Go to: <http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/ghgemissions/ind-calculator.html>
* READ THE INSTRUCTIONS
* Click on “Next Section”
* Begin filling out the questions
* If you do not know exact estimates for energy use, simply use the averages provided for you by the website
* Use the EPA’s website to answer questions

1. Define carbon footprint in your own words.

2. What was your carbon footprint rating?

3. Did this rating surprise you? Why or why not?

4. What portion of energy use made up the largest part of your rating?

5. What are the 4 main greenhouse gasses? Which is most abundant?

6. What specific sources create carbon emissions? What is the largest source?

7. What specific things can you do as an individual to reduce your carbon footprint in the future? As a household?